

# In Brief

USDA Forest Service Pacific Southwest Region

## **ANGELES NATIONAL FOREST**

The Angeles National Forest is surrounded by the highly urbanized Los Angeles Metropolitan Area, making it within an hour's drive for more than 20 million people. The Forest comprises 25 percent of the land area in Los Angeles County and accounts for 72 percent of its open space, resulting in high use and an extensive wildland/urban interface. To the north, the fast-growing Antelope Valley completes the urban interface on all sides. The Angeles is unique in that it is nearly encircled by subdivisions, with homes right up to much of the Forest boundary.

The land within the Forest is as diverse in appearance and terrain as it is in the opportunities it provides for enjoyment. Elevations range from 1,200 to 10,064 feet, with the steep, rugged terrain of the San Gabriel Mountains making up most of the Forest's 656,000 acres. Much of the Forest is covered with dense chaparral, changing to pine and fir-covered slopes in the majestic peaks of the higher elevations. The Forest manages the watersheds within its boundaries to provide valuable water to southern California and to protect surrounding communities from catastrophic floods and wildland fires.

The Angeles ranks high among the nation's forests in recreation use, accommodating approximately 3.5 million visits annually. The Forest provides 557 miles of trails, 66 campgrounds, 36 picnic areas, boating and fishing on three lakes, fishing only on two additional lakes, day use and water play at three major recreation areas, four ski areas, managed target shooting areas, five visitor centers, and four off-highway vehicle (OHV) areas, as well as hunting, stream fishing and sight-seeing opportunities.

The Forest supports key infrastructure of southern California, including one of the nation's largest communication site complexes, major interstate and highway systems, and gas and electric transmission corridors.

### **Ecosystem Health and Forest Plan Revision**

Together, southern California's four national forests (Los Padres, Angeles, San Bernardino, and Cleveland) make up a major portion of the last islands of open space in a sea of urban development, providing habitat for native plants and animals. This includes 63 listed threatened and endangered species—one of the highest concentrations in the nation; the Angeles is home to 19 of these.

The current Forest Land and Resource Management Plans for these forests are ten to fifteen years old and have not been revised or significantly amended during that time. The four-forest province has combined forces in a joint Forest Plan revision effort known as the Southern California Conservation Strategy (SCCS), as they seek to address the many new issues and conditions common to all four forests.

The SCCS is working now to complete a joint environmental analysis with separate records of decision. They expect to complete this process in 2004. The draft environmental impact statement is scheduled for release in the fall of 2002. The province-wide Forest Plan revision process is engaging the public, scientists, forest users, and employees in improving the health of southern California ecosystems.

## **Ranger Districts on the Angeles**

In 1997, the Angeles National Forest reorganized from five to three Ranger Districts, delineated by major watershed boundaries:

**The Los Angeles River Ranger District** is bounded on the south by the cities of Los Angeles (population 3,600,000), Glendale (193,000), La Crescenta, La Canada-Flintridge (20,000), Pasadena (137,000), Sierra Madre (11,000), Arcadia (52,000) and Monrovia (39,000). The Angeles Crest Scenic Byway (State Route 2) leads to the majority of the recreation sites on the District, including the Charlton-Chilao Recreation area, Chilao Visitor Center, Buckhorn Campground, and the Angeles Crest Resorts ski area.

Important astronomical observations and research continue at the famed Mt. Wilson Observatory. The largest concentration of radio and television broadcast towers in the country is also located on Mt. Wilson. These facilities, which serve the nation's second-largest communications market, are operated under Forest Service special use permits. Additionally, the District administers commercial mining operations and special use permits for filming, utility corridors, water storage and flood control reservoirs, water transmission pipelines, electronic sites, organization camps, and environmental education centers.

**The San Gabriel River Ranger District** comprises the southeastern portion of the Forest, north of the cities of Duarte (population 22,000), Azusa (44,000), Glendora (51,000), San Dimas (35,000), La Verne (32,000), and Claremont (34,000). The San Gabriel Canyon and Crystal Lake Recreation Areas, accessed by State Route 39, are major attractions. The San Gabriel OHV Area offers OHV enthusiasts off-roading opportunities. Burro Canyon Shooting Park provides target shooting under managed conditions.

The District manages the wilderness on the Forest, including the San Gabriel and Sheep Mountain Wilderness areas, and portions of the Cucamonga Wilderness. The largest herd of Nelson Bighorn Sheep in California inhabits the District. Mt. Baldy Ski Area, located at the upper end of San Antonio Canyon, is a popular winter sports area operating under special use permit. The District administers a variety of land use permits including communication sites, lodges, reservoirs, and over 300 recreation residences.

**The Santa Clara/Mojave Rivers Ranger District** runs from Ventura County to the San Bernardino County line, and takes in the northern 60 percent of the Forest. The District surrounds the city of Santa Clarita (population 187,000) and the communities of Green Valley, Lake Hughes and Wrightwood. It lies adjacent to the city of Palmdale (population 122,000) and the communities of Little Rock and Pearblossom. Santa Clarita and Palmdale are growing five times faster than Los Angeles County as a whole.

Coordination of the Interstate 5 utility corridor is a major activity of the District. In addition to the freeway, the Interstate corridor includes the California State Water Project facilities, four electric transmission lines, three crude oil and two natural gas pipelines, and two fiber optics systems. It also includes the original road (circa 1920), which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Recreation areas on the District include Pyramid Lake and portions of Castaic Lake (on the State Water Project), Rowher Flat OHV Area and one shooting range. Approximately 3,000 acres of the Little Rock Reservoir Recreation Area, which formerly offered picnicking, camping and fishing opportunities, is now closed to all use until further notice, to protect the endangered southwestern Arroyo toad while additional species studies are being conducted. The District also has 13 organization camps, 160 recreation residences, and two ski areas under special use permit.